

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

WITH

*Copies of orders given for the protection of the white population of
Yucatan.*

MAY 15, 1848.

Read, and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate of the United States:

I communicate herewith a report of the Secretary of the Navy, together with the accompanying documents, in compliance with the resolution of the Senate of the 13th instant, requesting information as to the measures taken for the protection of the white population of Yucatan, by the naval forces of the United States.

JAMES K. POLK.

WASHINGTON, May 15, 1848.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
May 15, 1848.

SIR: I have the honor, in answer to the resolution of the Senate of the 13th instant, to transmit a copy of my communications to Commodore Perry of the 8th of March and of the 12th instant, on the subject of giving protection to the white population of Yucatan, with the naval forces under his command.

No advices have been received at this department from the commander or officers of the squadron in the Gulf of Mexico, of a date later than the 15th of April, ultimo. All the communications on the subject, received from any of them, have been already transmitted to the Senate.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
JOHN Y. MASON.

The PRESIDENT.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,

March 8, 1848.

SIR: Your despatch, No. 125, of the 15th February, 1848, with its enclosure, has been received.

During my absence from Washington, a communication was received from the honorable Secretary of State, under date 28th December, 1847, enclosing a copy of Mr. Buchanan's despatch to Mr. Sierra, a commissioner from Yucatan. I have acted under the impression that it had been communicated to you, with instructions to conform to the wishes of the President, as made known to Mr. Sierra. On receiving your despatch, I have caused inquiry to be made, and suppose that I was mistaken. I therefore hasten to make to you this communication, and to send to you copies of Mr. Buchanan's letters to the department and to Mr. Sierra. It is desirable that the Yucatecos shall have the benefit of the relief which was assured to them; and I therefore request that you will give immediate orders to carry out the proposed plan of exempting Yucatan vessels and cargoes from payment of duty at Laguna, as suggested in Mr. Buchanan's letter; and, as far as it can be satisfactorily ascertained, refund any duties which have been collected at that place since the date of February 4th, 1848, which duties would not have [been] exacted if you had received this instruction in due time, after the letter of the Secretary of State.

The President has heard with regret of the ferocious and murderous conflict now raging between the Indians and whites of Yucatan. I am happy to hear of your contemplated visit, and hope that you will be able, by your presence, to exert a favorable influence in checking the advance of the Indians towards the towns and villages on the sea coast. An application has been made to the department, and another by Mr. Sierra to the President, to allow a shipment of gunpowder, to enable the whites to defend themselves in their war with the Indians, to be landed at Sisal. I enclose you a copy of my answer. No authority can be given from the department to land articles contraband, without a knowledge of its necessity, and without satisfactory assurance that it will be applied exclusively to that object. But humanity requires that the importation should not be prevented, if you shall be satisfied that the powder is not to be used for other or hostile purposes towards us. If, when the vessel called the "Mary Ann" shall appear off the coast, the Indians shall have been defeated and dispersed, and, in your opinion, the powder should not be landed, you will not subject the vessel to any penalty or forfeiture, but will allow her to retire without landing that part of her cargo. If the contest still rages, and you are satisfied that the powder will not be used against us, you will interpose no impediment to its being landed at Sisal.

The department has entire confidence in your discretion, and in your judicious views of the best mode of maintaining intercourse with Yucatan.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Y. MASON.

Commodore M. C. PERRY,

Commanding Home Squadron, Gulf of Mexico.

[Confidential.]

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *May 12, 1848.*

SIR: Your course of proceeding, in your recent visit to various points along the coast as far as Campeachy, as reported in your several despatches, beginning with that of the 29th of February, has been highly satisfactory to the department.

The deplorable condition to which the State of Yucatan appears to have been reduced by the ferocious and inhuman war waged by the Indians against the government and white inhabitants of that State, appeals most strongly to the sympathies of the civilized world, and I am gratified to perceive that you have employed your kind offices, as well as disposed of the limited force at your disposal, so as to give protection to the inhabitants who are flying from their homes before a ruthless enemy.

I was very reluctant to order the "Albany" to Laguyra, when your force was so much weakened by the return of the Mississippi, John Adams, Germantown, and Saratoga to the north; but the despatches of Mr. Shields represented the condition of our citizens and their commercial interests in Venezuela as so critical, that the President considered it indispensable that a ship of war should be present to give protection if required. Your prompt despatch of the Albany on that interesting service is highly approved. The Germantown, Commander Loundes, sailed for Vera Cruz from Norfolk on the 25th of April ultimo, and the Saratoga, commander Nicholson, from the same place, on the 6th instant. Commander Nicholson has orders to touch at Aux Cayes, and to give any required protection to American interests in Hayti, and to report to you with the least possible delay.

The questions presented in your despatches are of very grave import. I send you, herewith, a copy of a message which the President deemed it to be his duty to send to Congress, on the second day of the present month, in regard to the affairs of Yucatan. You will perceive that he regards it as the settled policy of the United States not to permit any colonization of new territory on the North American continent by European monarchies; and recommends to Congress that means be placed at his disposal for the military occupation of Yucatan, with a view to save the white population from destruction by the Indian race, and to prevent the practical occurrence of the question by the Yucatecoes being compelled to receive protection from any European power.

During the present war with Mexico, conducted on our part with a humanity which must excite the pride of every American, it has been our constant policy to repel rather than encourage Indian depredations and incursions even on our enemy; and the liberal treatment extended to Yucatan, as the just reward of her neutral position, entitles her people to the full benefit of this policy.

I am aware that, from the necessity of your holding the several points now in your possession, and with your limited force, you cannot spare the means of effective assistance even, along the coast of Yucatan; and from the danger to which the vessels would be

exposed in the navigation of the gulf, there would be great danger of their loss, if their crews were landed, even if they were in sufficient number, or prepared with camp equipage or field artillery, for operations inland. I have not, therefore, expected you to do more with the naval forces under your command, than to give protection to the fleeing inhabitants, and, acting on the principle of my instruction of March 8th, waiving all belligerent rights against Yucatan as a part of Mexico, our enemy, permit munitions of war to enter her ports, if you are satisfied they are to be used for the defence of the whites against the savage enemy. It will be judicious to strengthen your forces at El Carmen; and, in addition to those already sent by you to Laguna, it would appear to me to be proper to send the entire detachment of marines now at Alvarado, with instructions to repel the Indians if they approach that point; but there is not sufficient force, nor have you the necessary equipment to justify a march into the interior. Such an operation should only be conducted by a well appointed military force.

Before the receipt of your despatch of the 29th of February, announcing your intention to sail for Campeachy on the next day, and communicating your purpose in regard to any intervention on the part of Spain, I had received despatches from Commander Bigelow, communicating the cautiously guarded instructions of the small Spanish vessels of war which were at Sisal. I am happy to learn, by your subsequent report, that no occasion has presented itself for you to determine whether the measures of the Spanish authorities of Cuba required interposition on your part.

While the United States are engaged in war with Mexico, the actual presence, without our consent, of the armed forces of a neutral power within the territory of our enemy, co-operating with any portion of the Mexican people in military operations, cannot be permitted. Such a state of things it is hoped will not occur. If you should have reason to believe that it will, you will communicate it without delay, that the President may take such course as his constitutional duty will require at his hands.

The distinguished services of Commander Bigelow are highly appreciated, and you will make known to him the unqualified approbation of the department of his ready acquiescence in your request that he remain in his command, after he had received a permission to return home.

Your despatch of 29th of March will be made the subject of a special communication.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Y. MASON.

Commodore M. C. PERRY,

Commanding U. S. squadron, Gulf of Mexico.